

Appendix E. Summary of comments on draft plan (May - June 2021)

CPW released a draft of this plan April 26, 2021 to the public, Task Force and Interagency Team. The draft plan was available for review on CPW's website for 30 days. Comment forms were available related to 1) What information was used to create the plan; 2) Existing Conditions: What did CPW hear, learn and confirm?; and 3) Proposed Management Approach. There was also a form for general comments.

CPW also announced that the findings in the plan indicate the threshold for recreational opportunities has been reached in ECSP. The multiuse connection between Eldorado Canyon and Walker Ranch will not be added to ECSP.

Comments to the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission (PWC)

As part of the comment period CPW staff presented to the PWC during their May 5th meeting in Grand Junction. The public may submit comments in writing or in person to the PWC for items on their meeting agenda. Three people spoke in favor of the draft plan. Written comments were received from 39 individuals and organizations primarily regarding the Eldo-Walker trail. Several of the letters were from members of the Task Force. There was overall support for the draft management plan and planning process. However, many of the comments expressed discontent regarding the trail decision.

Interagency Team

The Interagency Team (and their oversight boards) provided input on the draft plan via letters to CPW and the Parks & Wildlife Commission. Suggested edits were incorporated throughout the final plan. Overall comments are summarized here:

City of Boulder, Open Space and Mountain Parks

- The primary focus of the OSMP staff review was on ensuring management consistency, ongoing coordination and that no adverse effects to OSMP lands or management of them are anticipated.
- Overall, the plan facilitates management consistency and OSMP does not anticipate adverse effect to OSMP lands. Refinements and additional language around continued coordination and management were provided (and incorporated into the final plan)
- The creation of Protection and Natural Zones compliments the management area designations used by OSMP including the Habitat Conservation Area (HCA) designations for most of OSMP lands adjacent to ECSP.

City of Boulder, Open Space Board of Trustees

- The Open Space Board of Trustees appreciates Colorado Parks and Wildlife staff's work on the Eldorado Canyon State Park Visitor Use Management Plan and the difficult trade-offs outlined and presented in the draft plan. The draft plan reflects the complex management challenges that all land management agencies in the area are facing with rapidly increasing visitation and the accompanying impacts on valuable natural resources and visitor experiences.
- The OSBT strongly encourage the City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks' staff and the Eldorado Canyon State Park's staff to work closely together to ensure visitor safety and protection of natural resources on adjacent and jointly managed trails and

to improve visitor experiences by providing clear messaging and interpretive signing on these trails.

Boulder County, Parks and Open Space

Boulder County, Community Planning and Permitting

- The staff review focused on management consistency and potential impacts to the lands and community members in Boulder County.
- Boulder County supports strategies to reduce the number of vehicles being driven through Eldorado Springs and within the park
- In addition to specific ideas for consideration related to management strategies presented in the plan, there is also an additional suggestion to limit vehicles that enter the park to 80% of parking capacity during peak season and days even without a reservation system. This strategy would make it easier for drivers to find parking spots on their own and free up staff resources.
- The management zoning approach adds protection to the high valued habitat Boulder County has identified in inventories of county open space adjacent to ECSP.
- Boulder County supports the goal of having more staff and resources to manage the park. It is a gem in our county and the better it is maintained, the more it will be sustained for current and future generations. We also support continued collaboration with community stakeholders and adjacent land managers to ensure management strategies achieve the intended goals established.

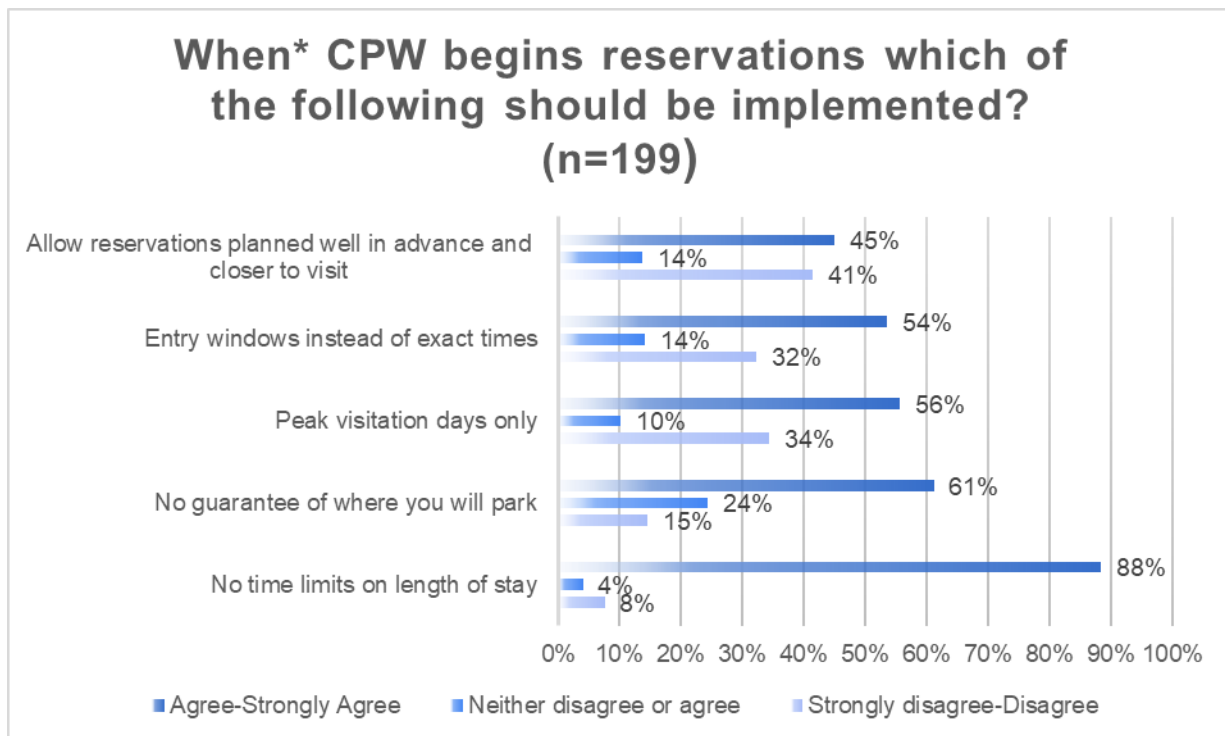
Boulder County, Boulder County Commissioners

- The Boulder County Commissioners support the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Department's decision not to add an additional multi-use trail for bikes from Eldorado Canyon State Park to Walker Ranch Open Space. The current multi-use Eldorado Canyon Trail connector to Walker Ranch allows ample access and recreational opportunities for climbing, hiking, dog walking and horseback riding.
- Having listened to and met with members of the public about Management Plan issues, there are three reasons for our position in support of the decision: congestion in the neighboring community and park, conflict/safety and habitat fragmentation/resource damage.

Responses from the climbing community

Comments to PWC, via the online comment form and letters from climbing organizations demonstrate the strong connection this community has to Eldorado Canyon State Park. An overwhelming majority (75-83%) of comments received via the comment forms were from climbers. While many people expressed support for the draft plan, the park, staff and more everyone had concerns about the impact of reservations on their access to ECSP and experience. There were some helpful suggestions and ideas for CPW to consider if reservations are planned. A letter from Boulder Climbing Community, Action Committee for Eldorado, Access Fund and Flatirons Climbing Council summarizes many of the concerns and areas of support. Commenters are likely members of these organizations or received their communications regarding the plan as evidenced by similarity in talking points. The highlights include:

- Appreciation for CPW staff and the plan seeking to find solutions to the challenges facing ECSP
- The rich history of climbing in Eldorado Canyon and ongoing stewardship work climbers participate in to manage their own impacts and protect the park
- Opposition to a universal park-wide reservation system, but recognize piloting a reservation system of some type needs input. They support the following features described in the draft plan (or details that would be developed with the pilot implementation planning):
 - Adaptive management to include monitoring data as well as visitor and stakeholder feedback
 - Limiting reservations to summer weekends and holidays
 - Limiting reservations to peak visitation hours is also encouraged
 - No time limit on length of stay is important
 - Reservations should be available in advance and spur of the moment
 - Reservations should be tied to cars/parking (i.e., no reservations for those entering by bike, foot or shuttle)
 - See figure below for a summary of comment form responses
- Advice to let climbers chose their own climb/crag regardless of crowding. Some may easily move to another climb while others have come a long way and/or are prepared for a specific climb.
- Allow annual pass holders entering the park via human-powered means to bring in additional users (i.e., that would have fit in a car) with no additional charge



**this chart includes responses from those commenting that they are completely against all reservations*

Summary from online comment forms

In addition to the comments from climbers summarized above, several other themes emerged in public comments. All themes had a range of related sentiments across the spectrum from full support to frustration that sometimes contributed to stated dissatisfaction for the entire plan. For example, while many people appreciated the complexity of the situation and CPW's efforts to find solutions some stated that everything is "fine as it is" and its "no big deal to show up early". Most commenters are very familiar with the park and are from somewhere in Boulder County or elsewhere in the Denver Metro area.

Themes included:

Planning process, details and approach

- There was appreciation for thoughtfulness and thorough assessments.
- 74% agreed or strongly agreed that the draft plan describes existing conditions at ECSP
- About 2/3rds of respondents to the question "What, if anything, in these chapters affected your understanding of the park's challenges and opportunities?" stated they have a better understanding via new and confirmed data. Topics mentioned include complexity of the situation, how many people come to the park, staff resources are overloaded, high rate of satisfaction for visitors (not including access/parking), the activities people enjoy at the park, where they travel from (Denver), etc.

Resource protection

- Resource protection goals are highly supported and cited as primary reason to like the plan
- 2/3rds of the respondents "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the Management Zoning scheme will support long-term protection of the park's most significant resources and unique visitor experiences

Alternate transportation/human-powered means

- Many people would like to see encouragement (and incentivizing) of accessing the park without vehicles or through ride-sharing. This included walking and biking (with reduced entry costs to do so) and continuing to offer shuttles.
- Opinions on limiting car access varied from there should be no limits on driving in to shuttle/walk/bike it only options.

Specific management strategies

- The following questions elicited over 500 responses: "What SOLUTIONS to parking and access issues have we missed? Please share other ideas that are feasible for CPW to implement that you believe would help reduce traffic congestion, improve trip planning and/or the arrival experience?"
 - Responses indicated there was very little CPW didn't include in the plan already but there were many details for considerations as management strategies are developed and implemented.
 - There is a high level of support for shuttles, communications & education and increased collaboration with the community, volunteers and partners.

- The following table summarizes responses to “Addressing healthy, safety, and access concerns are high priority. What else do you consider priorities for the next 3-5 years?” Resource protection continues to be noted as a high priority. The lower responses regarding signage, hours of operation and interaction with staff don’t reflect the higher volume qualitative comments about the need to increase education and communication.

Potential priorities	Percentage of respondents including this choice in their top 3
Address stream bank erosion and soil compaction issues along South Boulder Creek	62%
Continued monitoring of vegetation condition and wildlife surveys	54%
Develop and implement a trails plan	48%
Upgrade and add restroom facilities in high use areas	45%
Reduce/eliminate invasive plant and animal species	42%
Maintain and develop new wayfinding, regulatory and interpretive signage	17%
Establish and maintain regular hours of operation for the Entrance Gate and Visitor Center	17%
Increase face-to-face interactions between visitors and CPW staff	10%

Changes since draft plan was written

The draft plan was completed just as the global COVID pandemic erupted in March 2020 delaying the release of the plan. During the pandemic visitation to all state parks increased dramatically and public lands around the country began experimenting with reservations and other management strategies to address crowding. The shuttle was piloted tested in 2020 and 2021 and a vehicle checkpoint was piloted in 2021. The draft (and final) plan mentions the need for public land managers to learn from each other. ECSP staff continue to have conversation with Interagency Team, Jefferson County Open Space, Rocky Mountain National Park and others regarding Visitor Use Management.

As part of normal operations to review statewide regulations, policies and procedures within CPW, managers had conversations regarding “walk-in passes”. As of July 2021, Individual Daily Park Passes are \$4 per day for any non-vehicle entry (by foot, bicycle, horseback, etc.). Annual pass holders may carry their annual pass receipt, which allows up to 4 people access in lieu of the \$4 Individual Daily Pass Charge. At Eldorado Canyon, park visitors may not park in the Town of Eldorado Springs. Walkers and bikers that are not town residents must find legal parking outside of town. Language in the plan has been updated accordingly.

In December 2021 ECSP hired an Administrative Assistant increasing full-time staff to 5.

CPW is grateful to the hundreds of people who submitted thousands of comments on the draft plan. Many direct edits were incorporated into the draft plan. Suggestions for future management strategy development and refinement are being retained for reference.